**Chapter 1**

This chapter focuses on introducing the concept of differentiated instruction and learning by design, and how they play into one another in the classroom. Understanding by design focuses on the model used for teaching a lesson, and differentiated instruction focuses more on how to adapt that lesson for students of varying levels of knowledge, background, and fields of interest. The chapter reiterates that teachers need to exercise both of these practices, and that an effective learning environment cannot be maintained if both are not met. The chapter also talks about how teachers needs to be continually adapting their strategies and plans as new information and new circumstances are presented to them. Neither differentiated instruction or learning by design are rules or programs, but should be seen as tools to strengthen a student’s ability to be an effective learner and for instructors to be effective teachers.

This impacts my classroom and me because at any time I could have a student come in with a learning disability, language barrier, or some other form of difficulty that puts that at a different pace than the rest of the class. As a teacher, I have to be able to relay the same information to that student in a way that suits them best, but doesn’t ostracize or isolate that student. This could mean bringing in brail versions of books for students who are blind, or pairing a student who is a stronger reader up with a student who struggles with reading and comprehension. However, I do have concerns on what I would do in other scenarios. Such as if the class in watching the film adaptation of a book, and a blind or deaf student would not be able to get the same information from the film as the rest of the students. Would I simply excuse the student from the work associated with the film, or put them work separately from the other students on an alternative assignment?

**Chapter 2**

The focus of chapter two is explaining the importance of understanding one’s students on a personal level and taking that into account when trying to define their learning pace and style. A teacher who is willing to deviate from their originally laid lesson plan and is willing to let a student try an alternative method has a much better chance of classroom learning success than the teacher who will ignore the struggles of their students, and merely writes them off as “not caring.” Young adolescents will, more often than not, be rather reserved about their problems and struggles, sometimes because they themselves cannot identify them. Teachers who take the time to understand their students, get to know their backgrounds and personal interests and struggles, and is willing to show that student patience and guidance is going to build a much stronger and healthier teacher-student relationship. This will also help to improve the student’s relationship will school, because identifying a problem in one class can extend into a solution for that same student in another class.

My classroom, with a shred of doubt, will have students with a wide variety of interests and backgrounds, something I will need to take into account and take the time to understand. However, I struggle with the aspect of making connections with students whose backgrounds are vastly different from mine. I might be able to connect with a student who grew up in a rural area in a white neighborhood, but a student from the inner city of Harlem is going to have a backstory I cannot connect with on even the slightest level. I can certainly listen, and can say that I understand their frustrations and concerns, but these kids are not stupid, they can tell when an adult doesn’t truly understand. I struggle with crossing the socioeconomic gap in a way that doesn’t require them to sit down and interview a student and take notes on their experiences.

**Chapter 3**

The focus of this chapter is confronting the issue faced by all educators, at every level: fitting everything in the curriculum into a single school year. The best basis that a teacher can use in deciding what to teach is the state education requirements, and looking at what the students need to know when the either ascend into the next grade or graduate. The chapter does warn against falling into of the “sins” of teaching, which occur when a teacher turns everything into a fun filled activity, but the lesson is lost, or simply uses a textbook as a bible and never dares to deviate. Using the strategy of backward design allows a teacher to look at both long-term and short-term goals for their classroom, while still maintaining the creative and flexible atmosphere.

The school year never seemed long enough when I was the student, and it always seemed like teachers were scrambling and managing to let us get behind. As a teacher who will be running their own classroom, this fact that is constantly eating at the back of my mind when I work with students. Ideally I would like to work side-by-side with the teacher with grades above and below me, so that I can better understand what kind of knowledge the kids are coming in with and what they should be leaving with. By doing this I feel I can better determine the group’s knowledge level as a whole, and not have co-workers complain to me that the group they just received doesn’t know anything about grammar or can’t write a decent essay.

**Chapter 4**

This chapter ties back in with chapter two, in that it talks about getting to know ones students, specifically on an academic level. A teacher needs to know that what it is they are teaching is actually connecting in the student’s minds, and they are not just repeating what he teacher has already told them. Every student is going to require a slightly different learning method, in some cases more so than others, and in even more drastic cases the student may require an IED. It is crucial that a teacher is able to meet the needs of those students in a way that stimulates their minds, makes them ask questions, and pushes students to think outside of their normal comfort levels.

As an English teacher I need to be able to present lessons to my students in a way that they can connect with, but also be able to go forward and formulate their own thoughts and stimulate new ideas. I also need to be aware of the progress my students may or not be making, and decide whether it is a problem that can be fixed in a one-on-one meeting with that student, or if a parent-teacher conference would prove more beneficial. I also need to be vigilant of warning signs that a student might be facing a learning problem that extends beyond the normal struggling. By identifying those warning signs, I can even help to diagnose a student who’s parents, doctors, and previous teachers were unable to see the symptoms of a condition like ADHD or dyslexia.

**Chapter 5**

The focus of this chapter is how to properly go about assessing how much students know and later understand, and how to go about creating a rubric that asses each personal equally despite having different strengths in intelligences and skills. Once a teacher has answered these questions based off of the originally determined goals, they are able to focus their efforts and develop a more flexible learning plan. The chapter outlines the importance of performing ongoing assessments to track student’s progress, as opposed to a single final exam, which forces students to memorize more than understand and consider. By performing pre-assessments at the start of the year and before a new unit, the students have the opportunity to show what they might already know and where there are gaps in their knowledge. This also gives the teacher the opportunity to decide what kinds of options they want to give with assignments for students who might not require and IED, but still would benefit from alternative instruction.

This is an aspect of the classroom that I really am interested in putting into effect in my classroom. The teachers that I have had in the past that took the time to asses our progress and knowledge showed a much better understanding of their functioning classroom, and in some cases were able to skim over a topic the class showed advanced knowledge in, and use that time to focus on a weaker subject. I would not just apply this to students struggling to keep up, though they would be my first focus, it would also apply to students who do not feel challenged. By knowing what standards and goals I want these advanced students to meet, I can meet with the students, their parents, and even other teachers in order to create a curriculum that meets the students intellectual needs and the required standards.